Henry More and Nicolas Malebranche's Critiques of Spinoza

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I INTRODUCTION

It is something of a truism to observe that Spinoza's philosophy was controversial in his own time. Early-modern authors who presented critiques of some part of his system or other included: Noël Aubert de Versé, Pierre Bayle, Samuel Clarke, François Fénelon, Heinrich Horch, Isaac Jacquelot, Petrus Jens, Christian Kortholt, François Lamy, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Pierre Poiret, Pierre-Sylvain Regis, Lambert van Velthuysen, Christoph Wittich, and more besides. The present article, however, will be limiting itself to just two of Spinoza's other early critics: Henry More and Nicolas Malebranche. Moreover, even there, it will be limiting itself to their respective stances in relation to just one detail within Spinoza's overall metaphysical system, namely the position that he set out in the scholium to proposition 15 of part one of the *Ethics*.

There, Spinoza sought to explain how extended substance could present itself to the mind in two ostensibly incompatible ways, depending on how the mind came at it, whether intellectually conceiving of it *as* extended substance or alternatively representing the modes of this substance in the imagination. Conceiving of it in the former way, the mind would discover it to be indivisible, infinite, ungenerated, incorruptible and divine. Apprehending it in the latter way, it would discover it to be divisible, finite, generated and corruptible. Now, in their own respective metaphysical systems, both More and Malebranche also embraced a somewhat similar distinction between two kinds of extension, indivisible and divisible, infinite and finite, etc. (This is something of an over-simplification in Malebranche's case: but the point will be developed with greater precision in Section II below). However, for both of them, these really did need to be *two* kinds of extension. No single thing, they felt, could be both indivisible and divisible in itself: those attributes really were contradictory. But they also both recognised that Spinoza was postulating only a single extended substance. So then the question was: if that substance could not be both indivisible and divisible, then which one *was* it? With which of their own two alternative kinds of extension was his single kind to be associated? If two different mental faculties were suggesting opposite natures for Spinoza's extension, and if it could not actually possess both of these natures in itself, then one or other faculty must have been giving a false impression of how it really was: but which one? The interesting thing about the responses that More and Malebranche made to Spinoza is that, on these questions, they diverged. More felt that Spinoza's extended substance should be associated with his own conception of divisible matter. Malebranche, by contrast, felt that it should instead be associated with *his* own conception of indivisible 'intelligible extension'. The present article will explore this divergence, and consider it in relation to other divergences elsewhere in More and Malebranche's respective philosophical systems, specifically in their views on epistemology.

Just for the sake of orientation, I shall begin with a few dates. Spinoza lived from 1632 to 1677, in a series of Dutch towns and cities (Amsterdam, Rijnsburg, Voorburg, The Hague). He published his *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670, which already brought down much controversy upon him; and then, in 1677, this was followed by his no-less-controversial *Posthumous Works*, which presented the *Ethics* for the first time, alongside various letters and other writings.

As for Henry More, he lived from 1614 to 1687. He came originally from Lincolnshire, but was based in Cambridge from 1631 onwards, first as a student and then as a fellow. He published the first in a long line of philosophical works in 1642; and, in the 1670s, he was among Spinoza's earliest critics. As early as 1671, just a year after its anonymous publication, More was already sufficiently clued up to inform Robert Boyle 'that *Spinosa*, a Jew first, after a Cartesian, and now an atheist, is supposed the author of *Theologico-Politicus*'.[1] His full critique of that work, *Ad V.C. epistola altera*, was prepared in 1677, the same year that Spinoza's *Posthumous Works* appeared; and, within a year, More had written a second critique against the latter, *Demonstrationis duarum propositionum… confutatio* (henceforth, his '*Confutation*'). These two tracts were then published side by side in More's *Opera omnia* of 1679.[2]

Meanwhile, Nicolas Malebranche lived in Paris from 1638 to 1715. His public philosophical career did not start until just before Spinoza's death, with *The Search after Truth* in 1674–75; but he was highly active on the philosophical scene thereafter. He would presumably have known of More through the latter's published 1648–49 correspondence with Descartes, but he makes no actual mention even of this, and he certainly shows no sign of awareness of More's own more original works or his writings against Spinoza. (More, for his part, shows no sign of awareness of Malebranche's work either. He did read numerous works of other Cartesians of the period, but only in Latin. Malebranche worked exclusively in French, and his *Search* did not appear in Latin translation until 1685, after all of More's own major works had already appeared and only shortly before he died). As for Spinoza, and his *Ethics* in particular, Malebranche first started to discuss him in the mid-1680s (albeit only briefly), in the ninth of his *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques* (1683), and in the polemical exchange with Antoine Arnauld that followed over the next couple of years. We will be looking at these passages below. He also made a couple of passing references to Spinoza in his *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* (1688),[3] and in his final book, *Réflexions sur la prémotion physique* (1715)[4]; and (being inclined to associate Chinese philosophy with Spinozism), he further seems to have had an eye on Spinoza in his *Entretien d'un philosophe chrétien, et d'un philosophe chinois* and surrounding documents.[5] But his fullest discussion of Spinoza and Spinozism is to be found not in his public writings, but in the correspondence he had at the end of his life with Dortous de Mairan.

The young Mairan (1678–1771) engaged the elderly and increasingly frail Malebranche in a series of four letters in each direction, from Mairan's first, dated 17 September 1713, to Malebranche's last, dated 6 September 1714, which was almost the very last (extant) letter he wrote to anyone, prior to his final sickness and death the following year.[6] Now, Mairan could not really be called a card-carrying Spinozist. He told Malebranche, apparently quite sincerely, that he was deeply troubled by the consequences of Spinoza's principles; and yet, try as he might, he could not put his finger on any actual flaws in Spinoza's arguments.[7] In addition, he felt that Malebranche's own position was not so very far from Spinoza's. And so he sought to explore these arguments, and these apparent similarities, directly with Malebranche himself. In his first reply to Mairan, written during a sojourn in the countryside, Malebranche noted that he did not have a copy of Spinoza's book to hand, but that he had 'read a part of it some time ago', but had become 'soon disgusted, not only by the horrifying consequences, but by the falsity of the author's alleged demonstrations'.[8] And then, and over his subsequent replies, he proceeded to identify Spinoza's errors as he saw them, and to explain how his metaphysical system differed from Spinoza's.

Malebranche's focus in these letters, and More's focus in his *Confutation* (for I shall here be disregarding More's other anti-Spinozist text, the *Epistola* on the *Theological-Political Treatise*) was squarely on the first part of the *Ethics*. Malebranche, for his part, was generally content to write in general terms about certain themes and consequences of Spinoza's position in relation to his own, rather than making direct reference to particular passages in the text (aside from some of Spinoza's definitions). But those themes were all ones that arose directly out of that first part of the book. There was no discussion of Spinoza's theory of the emotions, for instance, or of the prospect of liberation from human bondage, or of any of the other things that got addressed in the four subsequent parts. As for More, he did cite and quote several specific propositions, axioms and definitions throughout his *Confutation*; and, towards the end of this work, he did start to make a few critical remarks on issues that came up towards the end of the *Ethics* itself, such as Spinoza's idiosyncratic conception of the immortality of the soul and the intellectual love of God. But a good four fifths of More's discussion were devoted to Spinoza's position as laid out in just the first fifth of the *Ethics* and in associated letters.

I am going to work on the assumption that the reader of the present article will already have a fair grasp on what Spinoza actually says in this part, so I shall not rehearse it in any great detail here. Still, for the sake of background, a quick summary, plus a closer look at the crucial scholium to proposition 15, might be in order.

The main result of part one of the *Ethics* is that there exists only one substance, which Spinoza calls 'God', or sometimes 'nature'. Implicit in this part, and explicit in the first two propositions of part two, is that God is essentially extended and thinking. The things that we regard as ordinary physical objects are really just modes of this substance, considered under the attribute of extension; and the things that we regard as individual minds and ideas are modes of the same substance, now considered under the attribute of thought. (In what follows, it will be the extended aspect of this substance that will concern us, as opposed to the thinking side of things). However, Spinoza also maintains that this one divine substance is infinite, eternal, ungenerated, incorruptible and indivisible. And yet surely extended things are finite, temporal, generated, corruptible, and above all divisible. Spinoza tells us in proposition 12: 'No attribute of substance can be truly conceived from which it would follow that substance can be divided'. But extension seems to be precisely such an attribute. Even if we leave aside the tricky question of whether physical objects are infinitely divisible, or else divisible only down as far as the level of atoms, how can anyone seriously deny that they *are* divisible; and, moreover, that are so by virtue of being extended? But then how can these divisible beings all exist in God (as Spinoza tells us in proposition 15: 'Whatsoever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God'), without conferring their divisibility onto him?

In the scholium to this proposition, Spinoza endeavours to ease this tension, and to show how the apparent divisibility of bodies can be reconciled with the indivisibility of the substance in which they modally inhere. After presenting a few other arguments concerning the infinity/finitude of corporeal substance, he writes:

> If I am now asked why we have this natural inclination to divide quantity, I reply that we conceive quantity in two ways, to wit, abstractly, or superficially—in other words, as represented in the imagination—or as substance, which we do only through the intellect. If therefore we consider quantity insofar as we represent it in the imagination—and this is what we more frequently and readily do—we find it to be finite, divisible, and made up

> of parts. But if we consider it intellectually and conceive it insofar as it is substance—and this is very difficult—then it will be found to be infinite, one, and indivisible, as we have already sufficiently proved…. For example, we conceive water to be divisible and to have separate parts insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is material substance. In this latter respect it is not capable of separation or division. Furthermore, water, qua water, comes into existence and goes out of existence; but qua substance it does not come into existence nor go out of existence.[9]

Later on, in the second half of part two, Spinoza will be addressing epistemological issues, and he there distinguishes between various different kinds of perception or knowledge. In particular, he sharply separates the imagination, together with the sensual perception in which it is grounded, from the mind's higher faculties of reason and intuition.[10] Imagination, he observes, is the only cause of falsity, while rational and intuitive knowledge necessarily has to be true.[11] Regardless of the faculty through which we apprehend it, the *object* of the mind's apprehension will be the same: for ultimately there is only one object available for the mind to apprehend at all, namely God or nature. But this object could well appear to our minds in very different ways, depending on the epistemological route we take to it. Our senses will put us in touch with the diverse array of modes that all collectively inhere in (extended) substance, while our more intellectual powers will allow us to penetrate to the inner essence of that substance as such. As the above scholium makes clear, this array of modes will be seen and imagined to be divisible. But, if the thing that we really want to know about is the nature of substance as such, such a superficial view will give us a false and grossly inadequate conception of that. Since we can intellectually recognise that substance is indivisible (as Spinoza just established in proposition 13), that must be how it truly is.

But enough of Spinoza's own position, for that is not really the one under scrutiny in the present article anyway. My focus is instead on More and Malebranche's *interpretations* of Spinoza's position, in the context of *their* own respective systems. So the question is not which conception Spinoza regarded as more adequately and truly capturing the nature of extended substance, so much as which one they *took* him to favour.

And this is also the reason why I have singled out More and Malebranche in particular, as opposed to any of Spinoza's other numerous early critics, and opted to focus on their responses alone. For, when we do look at their own respective systems, what we find is that they too proposed distinctions between two alternative conceptions of extension, the one divisible and the other indivisible, the one finite and the other infinite, and so forth. It is this that adds a special level of interest to their critiques of Spinoza.

For suppose, first of all, that you are just a run-of-the-mill Cartesian, somebody who believes that extension is the essence of matter, and that there can be nothing extended besides matter. Of course, good Cartesian that you are, you do also believe in immaterial substances in addition to this: the point is merely that you do not believe that those other substances are extended. You now come across Spinoza. Observing his claim that there exists an extended substance, you will surely conclude he must be talking about matter. For what else could he be talking about? As far as you are concerned, its extension will *entail* its materiality. Moreover, having already satisfied yourself that extension also entails divisibility, you might feel further vindicated in your interpretation when you come across his admission that extended

substance (or, at any rate, the modes thereof) can indeed be imagined as divisible. And you will not allow that anything can truly be both divisible and indivisible, because those are contradictory properties. So, when he additionally tries to maintain that extended substance can appear to the intellect as indivisible, you might simply dismiss this alleged intelligible indivisibility as *merely* an appearance; or perhaps a mistake or a deliberate subterfuge on the author's part; or at best a purely extrinsic feature that does not reflect the way the thing really is in itself. But then, observing that Spinoza is not only saying that such an extended substance exists, but is in fact going further by saying that no *other* substances exist besides this one, you are naturally going to conclude that he is simply a materialist. His ontology rightly includes material substance, but it wrongly excludes immaterial substances. Spinoza was certainly widely read as a materialist in his own time, and it seems plausible that thoughts along these lines may have been instrumental in leading many of his critics—even non-Cartesians—to that conclusion.

But now suppose that, in your own metaphysical system, you are inclined to countenance *two* really distinct kinds of extension, divisible and indivisible—indeed, material and immaterial—each of them close to one or other of Spinoza's two different takes on his own one extended substance. For this is what both More and Malebranche did. And therefore they both faced a choice. They were well aware that Spinoza believed that there was only one extended substance: few tenets were more central to Spinoza's system, and more prominent in his writings, than that. And they were not about to identify his extension with *both* of their own, precisely because they refused to identify those with one another. So which one would they pick? Would they treat sensible/imaginable divisibility, finiteness, generation and corruptibility as more accurately capturing the true, intrinsic nature of Spinoza's substance? Or would they favour intelligible indivisibility, infinity, and divinely eternal immutability? The intriguing answer is that, when faced with this choice over how to interpret Spinoza, More and Malebranche opted to go in precisely opposite directions. The chief purpose of this article is to explore that divergence.

We will come to the divergence itself in Section III below. But first we will need to look in more detail at precisely how More and Malebranche conceived their two alternative kinds of extension; for there are important differences between them here too. I shall begin with a summary of More's position, and then discuss Malebranche's, before returning to tackle their respective critiques of Spinoza head-on.

II TWO KINDS OF EXTENSION IN MORE AND MALEBRANCHE

More was quite adamant that there were indeed two quite different kinds of extension. Whereas Spinoza tried to make these merely different apprehensions of one and the same essence, More treated these two extensions as attributes of really distinct substances.[12] First, there were bodies, each of which was a really distinct material substance in its own right. Their extensions were knowable through the senses. They were physically divisible (or, to use More's preferred expression, 'discerpible'), as well as being impenetrable in the sense that it was strictly impossible that two bodies should exist in the same place at the same time. This was, indeed, his *definition* of what it meant to be a body: it was to be 'A Substance impenetrable and discerpible'.[13]

Bodies, for More, were also finite. This was certainly true of particular, individual bodies, each one of which would be bounded by some definite figure of some definite size. As for the sum total of all of the matter in the universe, More went

back and forth over the course of his career, on the question of whether that was finite or infinite in extent. But, at the time when he was writing his *Confutation* of Spinoza, he was satisfied that this too was finite. In that very work itself, he wrote of the universal matter that it was 'indeed not an infinite being, with respect to extension', and he referred his reader back to his *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (1671) for a demonstration of this.[14]

Finally, bodies were generated and corruptible. Through motion, various particles could come together to constitute a certain body of some brand new kind; which could then disintegrate, and cease to exist in that form, as those particles subsequently dispersed. Admittedly, in a natural process of generation and corruption like this, the underlying matter would still endure throughout: but More additionally believed that this underlying matter itself needed to have been initially created out of nothing by an omnipotent God, and that the same omnipotent power could (if God should will it) annihilate it too.

Second, More then postulated another extension, applicable to spiritual substances, which he explicitly described as immaterial. Such an extension played a variety of roles in More's system. For instance, finite instances of it would pertain to created spirits such as the human soul. But the clearest example of this immaterial kind of extension is the infinite one that he ascribed to space.

More's theory of space was, in some respects, a reaction against Descartes' position. Descartes, for his part, had held that there was no real distinction between a body and its space (or 'internal place'). When we regarded a certain extension as something particular, we would thereby be thinking about an individual body. Alternatively, when we regarded that extension as something generic, attending solely to its size, shape and position, we would be thinking about the space that the body occupied. But the object of our thought really would be one and the same extension either way, distinguished merely conceptually. Consequently, Descartes felt that it was strictly impossible for there ever to be such a thing as an empty space. The extension that constituted such a space, allegedly devoid of body, would also be constituting a body in that space.[15]

But More, as we have just observed, preferred to define the essence of body not in terms of extension as such, but rather in terms of divisibility ('discerpibility') and impenetrability. Consequently, the way was clear for him to postulate another kind of extension, really distinct from the corporeal kind, one that might be indivisible and penetrable. And so he did. As far as More was concerned, this was precisely the nature of the space in which a body inhered. More had various reasons for thinking that such a space was going to need to be really distinct from the bodies it housed: not least the fact that, unlike Descartes, he saw no contradiction in the supposition that such a space might indeed be entirely devoid of body. As it happens, More did believe that the *natural* world was actually a plenum: but he also believed that it should be *possible* for God, by his omnipotence, to produce a vacuum if he wished. It was just that this was not the sort of thing that God, in his fecundity, would ever wish to do.[16] And the mere fact that empty space was *possible* was sufficient to entail that the distinction between space and body needed to be more than just a matter of two different ways of conceiving one and the same extension.

More's space was insensible and, consequently, it could not really be pictured in the imagination either: 'the Notion of an *Incorporeal Substance*', he wrote, 'is so subtile and refined, that it leaving little or no impression on the *Phancy*, its representation is merely supported by the free power of *Reason*'.[17] As for its indivisibility, More's position was that, although we could focus our intellectual

attention on some particular region of space, this was really just a partial consideration of the whole. There was only a distinction of reason between the whole and the part on which we were opting to focus. The object of our thought would be the same in each case, and the difference lay merely in the adequacy (or otherwise) of our conception of it. Consequently, it would be a strict impossibility for even an omnipotent God actually to separate this region from the remainder—the very same kind of impossibility, as it happens, that Descartes had found in the notion of a space without a body. And More felt that it was precisely because space was penetrable that it could admit bodies into its own dimensions, and thereby supply them with their places, despite remaining really distinct from them.

Even if the corporeal universe was finite, More's space was definitely supposed to be infinite. It would extend endlessly beyond the world's outermost boundary in all directions, and it would certainly be void out there, even if there happened to be a plenum within. And because More felt that space was perfectly immutable, its various parts immobile, it was not subject to natural processes of generation and corruption as bodies were. Indeed, More went further: it was not even created or annihilable by God. And further still: space itself was positively divine. God could not annihilate, diminish, or in any way change space, any more than he could annihilate, diminish or change any of his other perfections (such as omniscience or omnipotence), for ultimately space was just another such perfection. In a famous passage from the *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, More listed some of the properties that applied both to space and to God, in order to draw the conclusion that—given that they had just so much in common—they could not be really distinct at all: 'Such as one, simple, immobile, eternal, complete, independent, existing from itself, subsisting by itself, incorruptible, necessary, immense, uncreated, uncircumscribed, incomprehensible, omnipresent, incorporeal, permeating and encompassing everything, Being by essence, Being by act, pure Act. There are not less than twenty titles by which the divine numen should be designated, which most aptly suit this infinite internal place which we have demonstrated to be in the universe'.[18] Just as a finite and created (though indivisible and penetrable) extension would pertain to the human soul, so too would an infinite and uncreated (and similarly indivisible and penetrable) extension pertain to God himself. God's own substance permeated the universe, thereby constituting the space in which the finite, generated, corruptible, divisible and impenetrable extensions of bodies found their places.

So much for More: what about Malebranche? In his case, we also find an analogous distinction. But it was an importantly different one too: for, when it came to the nature of bodies (even if not always on other matters), Malebranche was a faithful Cartesian. Unlike More, Malebranche *did* think that the distinction between a body and the space (or internal place) that it occupied was merely a distinction of reason. For Malebranche, the essence of matter was defined by extension, as opposed to divisibility and impenetrability. Following Descartes, he believed that divisibility and impenetrability were direct corollaries of the mere fact of being extended, so that the notion of an indivisible and penetrable extension, of a kind that might be ascribed to an immaterial space, was ruled out from the start. As far as Malebranche was concerned, the only kind of real extension that existed was divisible and impenetrable, created and annihilable, and its various individual parts—particular bodies—were subject to generation and corruption through the motions of their own really distinct component parts. Moreover, those particular bodies were necessarily finite. The concept of infinity, Malebranche felt, could only properly be applied to God, and he was absolutely explicit in insisting that no created extension could ever be infinite.[19]

Admittedly, Descartes had said much the same thing, and yet Descartes did also believe that the corporeal world *as a whole* was 'indefinite', with bodies extending outwards in all directions without limit. Malebranche, for his part, was rather cagey on the issue of whether the corporeal world as a whole was bounded or not—although there is a reason for this, which I shall come to shortly. But, even if the whole universe did turn out to be bounded, there would be literally *nothing* on the other side of such a boundary, not even empty space. The boundary would have no 'other side' at all.

Clearly, then, Malebranche was not about to endorse anything akin to the incorporeal yet extended space of Henry More—or, perhaps more pertinently, anything akin to the space of Pierre Gassendi. Gassendi, for his part, had also postulated two kinds of extension, corporeal and spatial; and, unlike in the case of More's work, Malebranche *was* aware of Gassendi's. Gassendi had held that God had created the corporeal world in some determined region of an incorporeal, indivisible and penetrable space. This space was itself uncreated: it pre-existed the world that was created within it, and it would still remain even if God was to annihilate that world. It was also unbounded: even beyond the outermost parts of the corporeal world, space itself would just carry on going forever. Gassendi was content to adopt traditional Scholastic terminology in calling this extra-mundane extension 'imaginary space', but he insisted that this should not be taken to mean that it was something dependent on the imagination like a chimera. It meant merely that the conception we had of its dimensions was formed in the imagination through an analogy with the sensible dimensions of bodies. But, even so, it was a real being in its own right, and its own dimensions really were intrinsic to it.[20] Admittedly, Gassendi did not adopt More's final manoeuvre, to treat this space as divine; and there were other differences between them too (e.g. over whether there were any interstitial vacua within the natural world). But, by and large, Gassendi's theory of space was pretty close to More's.

Now, although Malebranche did not mention Gassendi by name on this particular occasion, he might well have had him in mind when writing the ninth of his *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques*—which, as already noted, was also the place where he first mentioned Spinoza. In §8, Malebranche referred to those who 'conceive that the world was created in immense spaces, that these spaces never started [to exist], and that not even God could destroy them'. Such an opinion, he observed, would lead people to think that matter itself was uncreated and eternal: for, after all, what *was* matter (in his view) but extension, i.e. space? It was in §13 that Malebranche would go on to note that 'the miserable Spinoza judged that creation was impossible'.[21]

However, in between those two sections, Malebranche declared that actually there *were* two kinds of extension after all. 'But you must distinguish two kinds of extension', he wrote in §9, 'the one intelligible, the other material. Intelligible extension is eternal, immense, necessary. It is the immensity of the divine Being. It is the intelligible idea of an infinity of possible worlds'.[22] Now, this notion of 'intelligible extension' was one that Malebranche had first introduced in 1678, in the Tenth Elucidation to *The Search after Truth*, and it featured prominently in his works thereafter. His proper conception of it will be explicated in a moment: but, just on the face of it, there seems to be a problem here. When Malebranche says that intelligible extension is eternal, immense and necessary, does this not conflict with everything that he has just been saying, even in this very discussion? Surely this so-called second kind of extension, distinct from material extension, will simply reduce to the space of

Gassendi or More, contradicting Malebranche's explicit rejection of such conceptions of eternal and immaterial spaces.

Antoine Arnauld, for his part, certainly thought so. The remark just quoted comes from the first edition of this work, published in 1683, and Malebranche would be slightly modifying it when it came time for him to produce a second. For, in the interim, Arnauld raised certain objections against this discussion. In his *Défense contre la Réponse au livre Des vrayes et des fausse idées* (1684), the latest instalment in his voluminous and far-reaching polemical exchange with Malebranche, Arnauld accused Malebranche's purported distinction, between material and intelligible extension, of inadvertently boiling down the very same distinction between material and spatial extension that Malebranche himself found so objectionable in Gassendi. He complained that what Malebranche was saying here about this supposed infinite intelligible extension entailed:

> that it is a true *extension*, a *formal extension*, which is not different from the extension that you call material, except because the first is *necessary*, *immense*, *eternal*, whereas the other cannot be so; for [the other] is bounded, and was created in time: unless this further difference should be added, that the first, which you call intelligible, is penetrable and immobile, whereas the other is impenetrable and mobile. And thus I do not at all see that this *infinite intelligible extension*, which you say is the immensity of the divine being, is different from the space of the Gassendists, for they also say that there is a *necessary*, *immense*, *eternal*, *penetrable* and *immobile* extension; though they do not say that it is God.[23]

However, Arnauld also recognised that Malebranche had had Spinoza in view in this passage, at least as much as he did Gassendi. Arnauld returned to it later on in this same *Défense*, and he now observed: 'To understand this passage well, it is good to note that he here had it in view to refute Spinoza, who believed that the matter of which God made the world was uncreated, and that he is seeking a reason that brought that impious person into this error'.[24] Arnauld noted Malebranche's opinion that this reason lay in an erroneous belief that there existed an extension that was necessary and eternal (such as that of an immense space in which the world was created), coupled with a conflation of matter with such a space. But then, when Malebranche *himself* started to distinguish between (to use Malebranche's own words) 'two kinds of extension', treating one of these as the necessary and eternal immensity of the divine being, Arnauld felt that this so-called 'intelligible extension' would still need to be regarded as 'a true and formal extension' in its own right. Consequently, Malebranche's position would itself just boil down to the very kind of position that he was trying to get away from.[25]

In his *Trois lettres*, published the following year (1685), Malebranche responded to the second of these two discussions in Arnauld's *Défense*, expressing the hope that a careful examination of it might 'perhaps at the same time serve to disabuse the *Spinozists*, and those who believe that the world is eternal; and ultimately perhaps [also] those who imagine that the so-called "imaginary" spaces are the divine immensity and the divine substance, in itself or insofar as it is present everywhere, even beyond the world'.[26] Malebranche explained that he did not believe that the thing that he was calling 'intelligible extension' was formally extended at all. It was, he said, merely 'the *Archetype* of bodies, or what there is in God that represents bodies'.[27] Intelligible extension, he explained, 'is the divine substance insofar as it is

representative of spaces, and not insofar as it is spread through immense spaces…. For I believe that God is beyond the world by the actual presence of his substance: but I do not believe that he is there in the manner of bodies, I mean, larger in a larger space, and smaller in a smaller one'.[28] Sure enough, in the second edition of the *Méditations chrétiennes* (1694), Malebranche modified the 'two kinds of extension' passage, so as to make it now read: 'But you must distinguish two kinds of extension, the one intelligible, the other material. Intelligible extension is eternal, immense, necessary. It is the immensity of the divine Being, insofar as it is infinitely participable by corporeal creatures, insofar as it is representative of an immense matter. It is, in a word, the intelligible idea of an infinity of possible worlds'.[29]

As far as Malebranche was concerned, neither intelligible extension, nor the substance of God in which it inhered, could be extended—and therein lay its chief difference from More (or Gassendi's) space. For Malebranche, God's immensity could not be understood in terms of extension, for that would indeed have been tantamount to making God corporeal. Rather than being spread out, partly here and partly there, Malebranche instead conceived of his God in the more traditional Scholastic manner, as being *wholly* present in each and every part of the corporeal world, a very different mode of presence from that which pertained to the bodies themselves. However, when God reflected on his own immensity, he recognised that this perfection could be imperfectly participated in (or imitated by) his creatures. Although no single creature could be present everywhere, still less wholly present everywhere, a creature could nevertheless have a less perfect form of presence by being finitely extended, i.e. by being corporeal. Since God would only ever act wisely, it was necessary that he should have an archetypal idea of anything that he was going to create, prior to that act of creation. But such ideas, being themselves uncreated, could not be distinct from him, for he was the only uncreated being. As Malebranche put it, in the course of the 1678 discussion wherein he had first unveiled his theory of intelligible extension, 'God's ideas of creatures are, as Saint Thomas says, only His essence, insofar as it is participable or imperfectly imitable, for God contains every creaturely perfection, though in a divine and infinite way'.[30]

Moreover, God also allowed our own intellects to enter into an illuminating union with intelligible extension, i.e. with the divine idea of body in general, thus understood as God's own immensity insofar as it was variously participable by creatures. In so doing, God thereby allowed us to discover the very same things therein that he had already seen: and the things that he, and we, discovered would be all of the possible *modes* of corporeal creatures. The idea of extension, wrote Malebranche, 'can represent only successive or permanent relations of distance, i.e., instances of motion and figure'.[31] A body could only imitate God's immensity in an imperfect, limited way. But different limitations in different cases would render one body square and another round, one larger and another smaller, one moving and another at rest in relation to its neighbours. But then, since it would be these modes—and, more precisely, the fine configuration and motions of the microscopic particles—that were determining the physical behaviour and appearance of any given body, we could effectively discover all possible *bodies* in intelligible extension. After all, Malebranche regarded a mode as being identical with its own substance, insofar as that substance was existing in a certain way: 'the actual roundness and motion of a body are but that body shaped and moved in this or that way'.[32] And so we could grasp the ideas of all possible created corporeal substances in God. Indeed, Malebranche went even further than this. With his theory of 'vision in God', he explained how this same divine intelligible extension could be the immediate object

of our minds, not only in purely intellectual intuition, but also in sensual perception. When our apprehension of it was modified by a 'sensation', i.e. by some particular mode of thought such as a colour, this would signal to us not merely that it was *possible* that a body of a certain kind should exist, but that such a body did *actually* exist, and that it was actually affecting our own bodily sense-organs.

It was thus that Malebranche resolved the various ideas of different kinds of body into a single idea of extension in general. He did not feel that such particular ideas should be regarded as modes of God, or even as modes of the intelligible extension that subsisted in God. For Malebranche, modification meant restriction. The shape or size, for instance, of a created corporeal substance, signalled not only how far it went, but also where it stopped. When a creature was determined into some particular form, this meant that it could not simultaneously possess other, contrary forms. But Malebranche's God was necessarily infinite and unrestricted. Indeed, he was not even a particular being, but completely universal, 'being in general' as Malebranche called him. Consequently, he was not a fit subject for modification. Immediately prior to the comment quoted above, where Malebranche explained that the divine ideas were God's essence insofar as it was imperfectly participable, he observed that these ideas were not modifications of God's substance, because 'the Infinite Being is incapable of modifications'.[33] Rather, these particular ideas were merely the ideal and intelligible *representations* of possible modifications of particular finite creatures, and they were all collectively united in one general and infinite being. Malebranche wrote: 'as all particular bodies are composed of a common and general extension or matter, and a particular form, so the particular ideas of bodies are only made of the general idea of extension, viewed under forms or through different intellectual or sensible perceptions'.[34] When we—or God—apprehended intelligible extension as such, we were discovering the general essence of matter as such, and could grasp the natures of all possible bodies. When we limited our attention to some particular cluster of possible modes—sizes, shapes, motions—as represented therein, we would be apprehending the idea of some particular kind of body, as defined by those modes. Either way, the immediate object of our mind was God's own essence. It would not be quite right to say that we could *see God*, for we certainly could not grasp God's essence adequately, and apprehend it as it was absolutely. We could only apprehend it insofar as it was imitable by bodies. But, as for the bodies themselves, we could not apprehend *them* directly at all, but only via this ideal representation.[35]

Malebranche did not actually believe that it was even possible to demonstrate the real existence of the corporeal world. He was satisfied that such a world did indeed exist, but that was on the basis of faith. As far as philosophical demonstration was concerned, this could at best be used to show that the corporeal world *probably* existed.[36] The existence of creatures of any kind was grounded in God's will, and Malebranche sharply distinguished God's will from his intellect. All that we could know with certainty were the eternal and uncreated essences of possible things that we apprehended in the latter. To discover what God had actually chosen to create, given that we had no direct intuition of God's volitions themselves, we would need to turn instead to the evidence of our senses. But our senses would only give us a confused and exceedingly limited grasp on the bodies around us, for the sake of the preservation of the union of our own bodies and souls (i.e. so that we did not keep bumping into things and injuring ourselves, thereby jeopardising that union). Moreover, as the sensations of amputees would suggest, the laws of soul-body union would sometimes cause our sensations to lead us to believe that certain bodies existed,

when actually they did not exist at all. And this was, incidentally, also the reason why (as already noted above) Malebranche was generally quite reluctant to come down firmly on the question of whether the corporeal universe as a whole was bounded or unbounded. He wrote to Mairan, in the course of the very correspondence that is of principal concern in the present article:

> the idea of extension is infinite, but its *ideatum* possibly not. Perhaps it has in fact no *ideatum*. I see immediately only the idea and not the *ideatum*, and I am persuaded that the idea has been for an eternity without *ideatum*. The idea is eternal, infinite, necessary and even efficacious, for it is only the idea that acts on minds, that illuminates them and that can make them happy or unhappy. But I do not see the *ideatum* immediately. I do not know except by a kind of revelation that there is one.[37]

Still, notwithstanding Malebranche's caution over our *route* towards certainty in the existence of bodies, he was nevertheless satisfied that they did indeed exist. And so he drew a distinction between the uncreated intelligible extension in God that *represented* the corporeal world, and the created material extension that *constituted* the corporeal world. We have already seen the principal difference between Malebranche's intelligible extension and More (or Gassendi's) spatial extension, that the former, notwithstanding its representational content, was not actually supposed to *be* extended: 'God is all that he is everywhere that he is, and he is everywhere. The idea of extension or intelligible extension, in itself or according to its absolute reality, is not locally extended at all, as I have proved in my first Letter against M. Arnauld's *Défense*. It is only intelligibly extended, i.e. representative of a formal extension'.[38] And we must never lose sight of this crucial difference between More and Malebranche. But, bracketing it for present purposes, Malebranche's distinction between corporeal and intelligible extension really did have quite a lot in common with the distinction we already examined in More's system.

For Malebranche, just as for More (and near enough anyone else one could care to mention), sensible bodies were divisible, and also impenetrable. Indeed, unlike More (who embraced a form of atomism), Malebranche was satisfied that they were *infinitely* divisible. Particular bodies were generated through the convergent motions of their component particles, and they were corruptible as those particles subsequently came to disperse; and, although the underlying matter itself might endure throughout, that did at least need to have been created out of nothing by God in the first place, and it could in principle be annihilated again by him. And Malebranche's bodies were finite, at least if we are considering the extension of any particular corporeal individual.

Meanwhile, intelligible extension was infinite, albeit not in extension (for it was not formally extended at all). Rather, its infinity pertained to its inexhaustible objective reality. Intelligible extension represented infinitely many possible modes, and thereby represented the infinitely many possible extended substances that could bear such modes. It was also supposed to be indivisible. It is true that Malebranche was content to attribute 'intelligible parts' to intelligible extension, or to speak of 'intelligible circles', 'intelligible squares', 'intelligible horses' or 'intelligible trees'. But, for him, these were merely partial considerations of the one intelligible extension, as we focused our intellectual attention on the representations it contained of those various possible modes of created extension, or of the ideas of the possible beings defined by such modes. The object of our thoughts was one and the same

simple thing in every case, and the only difference lay in the adequacy (or otherwise) of our conception thereof. Given all this, there was also no possibility that such intelligible parts might actually move about in relation to one another; and, consequently, there was no possibility of generation or corruption in intelligible extension. It was not even a creature, for it needed to be archetypally prior to all creation in order to facilitate it. And it was so immutable that not even God himself could alter it. Whereas Descartes and some of his followers, equating God's understanding with his will, had allowed him dominion over the eternal truths, Malebranche rejected this. For him, such truths subsisted as relations between the ideas that collectively constituted the intelligible world of his understanding; and his understanding was prior to his will. And, ultimately, the intelligible world *was* God, albeit not as he was absolutely, but insofar as he was imperfectly participable or imitable by his creatures.

Thus, to the extent that a point as crucial as the non-extendedness of Malebranche's intelligible extension can be set to one side, we can see a close structural parallel between the distinctions that he and More were drawing between (to use the somewhat loose expression that Malebranche himself was content to adopt in the *Méditations chrétiennes*) 'two kinds of extension'. One was sensible, divisible, finite, generated and corruptible; the other was intelligible, indivisible, infinite, ungenerated, incorruptible and, indeed, divine. But then this was also, more or less, the same distinction that we saw in the scholium to Spinoza's proposition 15. When we approached Spinoza's extended substance via the senses or imagination, construing it as water (or whatever other particular kind of body it might happen to be manifesting itself as), we would find it to be divisible and finite, and that it came into and went out of being. When we instead approached it via the intellect, we would find it to be indivisible, infinite, and eternally immutable.

Now, Malebranche never actually tackled this particular scholium head-on. But then, he barely made any direct textual references to Spinoza at all, content instead to discuss the latter's system in much more general terms. (Remember that, in some of these discussions, he did not even have a copy of the text to hand, but was relying on his memory of its general tenor).[39] But More did address it in his *Confutation*, and he criticised it at length.[40] I shall come to some of his more specific criticisms of Spinoza in what follows. But, fundamentally, both More and Malebranche's attitude was that contradictory properties, such as divisibility and indivisibility, could not pertain to one and the same object in itself. As I already noted in Section I, they were somewhat unusual for their era—and herein stand out among Spinoza's early critics—by both being prepared to postulate an indivisible extension (or quasi-extension) in addition to the familiar divisible one: but they were quite adamant that these two extensions really did need to be *different*. But then they also both correctly recognised that Spinoza denied that there were two really distinct kinds of extension. Therefore, if at most one of their own alternative conceptions could truly define the single extension that he did countenance, it would follow that the other kind was simply missing from his ontology. Maybe his one extension might appear in these contradictory ways, according to the different ways in which it was apprehended by the mind: but at least one of these ways could not adequately reflect the intrinsic nature of the mind's object, or of anything else genuinely real at all. But then the question is: if these two conceptions cannot *both* capture the true, intrinsic nature of Spinoza's extended substance, then *which one* more adequately does so? The way was clear for More to identify Spinoza's substance *either* with matter *or* with space, but not with both; and the way was clear for Malebranche to identify it *either* with matter

or with intelligible extension, but not with both. So which one would they pick? Would they treat sensible divisibility, finiteness, generation and corruptibility as more accurately capturing the true, intrinsic nature of Spinoza's extended substance, or would they instead favour its intelligible indivisibility, infinity, and divinely eternal immutability?

III MORE AND MALEBRANCHE'S INTERPRETATIONS OF SPINOZA'S THEORY OF EXTENSION

As far as More was concerned, Spinoza was simply a materialist. More observed, early on in his *Confutation*, that Spinoza was 'one in whose writings *Matter*, *Nature*, and *God* sound the same'.[41] At another point in this work, he took a sequence of eleven remarks, lifted directly out of Spinoza's own text, each one making some declaration or other about God, and he observed: 'if you substitute the name, matter, or understand that matter is being spoken of, all flow with wonderful ease, since otherwise quite hard paradoxes will be seen, and on account of a reason as frightful as strange, for, you may be certain he understands by that God matter, and not an eternal and omniscient, etc., spirit'.[42] In the eleven quoted propositions that followed, whenever Spinoza happened to mention God, More would follow this with his own bracketed interpolation of 'i.e. matter'. Thus, for instance: 'Individual things are nothing but the modifications or modes of the attributes of God [i.e. matter], etc. Corollary, Prop. 25'.[43] Later on, More went further still, and now resorted simply to rewriting Spinoza's text, dropping the word 'God' altogether. Thus, Spinoza's fourteenth proposition ('Besides God, no substance can exist, nor be conceived') became, in More's hands: 'Besides matter, no substance can exist, nor be conceived'.[44]

For his part, More did not think that the universal matter was either eternal or infinite: but he was by no means oblivious to the fact that Spinoza was treating his substance as such.[45] So did this observation shake his conviction that Spinoza was identifying his substance with matter? Not at all. He was still convinced that Spinoza was attempting to make such an identification: all that this went to show that he was too inept even to do *that* right. Not only was Spinoza embracing a materialist conception of God—which was already bad enough—but his conception of matter itself was a false and incoherent one anyway. Or, again, More spotted that, besides extension, Spinoza was also treating thought as an attribute of substance. But he just took this to mean that Spinoza believed that all material things could think:

> If, therefore, properly speaking, Spinoza makes thought an attribute of God, it is necessary to ascribe thought to God universally, that is, to the individual parts of God, so that lead and stones think.[46]

> To all of which you may add, since he concedes there is no substance besides *matter* in nature, nor can anything besides *mode* and *substance* be conceived, the human mind, according to Spinoza, is necessarily a mode of some matter, which, to the degree that it is more subtle and active, consists of more subtle and dispersable particles.[47]

And, from More's point of view, this was just one more easily refutable blunder on Spinoza's part. One of the main themes of More's own philosophical work had always been a defence of the immateriality of thinking substances, in opposition to

various forms of materialism, such as that of Hobbes. And it was with Hobbes that More now associated Spinoza. He saw his objective as being to 'cut the sinews of the Spinozan and Hobbesian cause'.[48]

And so, although More *could* have opted to associate Spinoza's extension with his own divine spatial extension, he did not do so. Instead, he associated it with his own material extension, and he felt that Spinoza's ontology simply failed to include anything properly worthy of the name 'God' at all. In the case of Malebranche, by contrast, we find precisely the opposite interpretation of Spinoza's position. Again, there were two alternative readings of Spinoza on the table for Malebranche. He could equally well have opted to associate it either with his own material extension, or with his own divine 'intelligible extension'. But Malebranche picked the latter. For him, the thing that Spinoza was retaining was God, and it was *matter* that was missing from his ontology.

Already, in one of his earliest allusions to Spinoza (1685), Malebranche observed that 'the Spinozists confuse the idea of bodies with the bodies themselves'.[49] But then, remember what Malebranche thought the idea of bodies was. It was the intelligible extension of the divine substance itself, insofar as its immensity was imperfectly imitable or participable by creatures. Admittedly, just to say that Spinoza confuses two things with one another does not necessarily entail any particular view about which of these is being reduced to the other, or whether perhaps they are simply meeting in the middle. But Malebranche returned to the same theme in his correspondence with Mairan, almost thirty years later, and there he developed it more fully.

In his first letter to Mairan, Malebranche wrote of Spinoza as follows:

> The chief cause of the errors of that author comes, it appears to me, from the fact that he takes the ideas of creatures for the creatures themselves, the ideas of bodies for bodies, and that he supposes that one sees them in themselves: a gross error, as you know. For, being inwardly convinced that the idea of extension is eternal, necessary, and infinite, and further, assuming creation to be impossible, he takes for the world or created extension the intelligible world that is the immediate object of mind. Thus he confuses God or the sovereign Reason that includes the ideas that enlighten our minds with the work that those ideas represent.[50]

Although merely 'confusing' one thing with another ('*il confond… avec…*') might not determine any kind of priority between the two of them, 'taking' one of them for the other ('*il prend… pour…*') does suggest that it is supposed to be the former that is the genuine object here, and that the latter is being confused with *it* rather than vice versa. The starting point for Malebranche's Spinoza seems to be the ideas of creatures, the ideas of bodies, and the intelligible world in God. So far, so good. But where this Spinoza then falls short is in failing to offer up the requisite creatures, bodies and extended world that ought to be postulated in addition to these.[51]

Mairan, for his part, certainly seems to have taken Malebranche's comment in this way. In his reply, Mairan wrote: 'it is clear that your *intelligible extension* is nothing else than the extended substance of which *created* or *material extension*, that is to say, bodies, color, hardness, etc.—insofar as they affect our senses and our imagination—are but simple modes'.[52] Remember that Mairan was here defending Spinoza's position (or at least Spinoza's arguments). Unlike Malebranche (or, for that matter, More), he was prepared to concede that perhaps there might indeed be just one

common substance, in which all bodies could collectively inhere as modal beings. But, as to what this one Spinozistic substance was actually like, he too was inclined to associate it with Malebranche's intelligible extension, rather than associating it with matter as Malebranche conceived that. Now, as we have already observed, Malebranche did not believe that God (or intelligible extension) was a fit subject for modes, on the grounds that he construed a mode as a restriction on a substance, and he felt that a necessarily infinite being was incapable of restriction. So Malebranche was certainly not going to allow that bodies were to be understood as modes of intelligible extension. On the contrary, as he told Mairan in his next letter, they are *parts* of created extension.[53] The appearance and physical behaviour of each individual body might, indeed, be determined by its modes, rather than by the essence common to all bodies. But those modes would need to be getting applied to really distinct substances, independent parts of a larger whole, for otherwise a single subject would be finding itself modified in several contradictory ways at once, round as well as square, moving as well as resting.

However, as we have also observed, what Malebranche did believe was that all corporeal modes were collectively *represented* in intelligible extension, thereby giving rise to the eternal and immutable *ideas* of different kinds of bodies. It was these ideas that Spinoza—or, in this case, Mairan—was taking for the creatures themselves. Continuing the same theme in his next letter, Mairan wrote:

> Therefore every body is the modification of intelligible extension, or intelligible extension is the subject, the essence or the substance of every body. Therefore if intelligible extension is in God, every body is the modification of the divine essence, or the divine essence is the substance of all bodies. Therefore the terms *representative essence*, *participable by creatures*, and *archetype of bodies*, etc., which you apply to it [sc.: to your intelligible extension], and which seem to save or soften the conclusion, if they are well understood, reduce it to those of substance and essence of bodies.[54]

Malebranche replied, repeating the same fundamental allegation against Spinoza:

> Thus I say again that the author is mistaken, since he takes the idea of the world, the intelligible world, or intelligible extension, for the world, ideas for the things themselves, and because he believes that the extension of the world is eternal, necessary, etc., because intelligible extension is so…. The intelligible world is in God and is God himself, for what is in God is, substantially, all of God. It [intelligible extension] is not a modality [of God], since there is no modality of the infinite, no nothingness in being, nor anything that limits infinite being. God is everything that he is, everywhere he is, in everything he is, something that the finite mind cannot comprehend. But when we think of extension, of the intelligible world, we do not see the essence of God according to what it is in itself absolutely. We only see what God saw in himself, when he wanted to create the world.[55]

To this, Mairan expressed bewilderment as to why Malebranche should persist in telling him 'that the author confuses the ideas of things with the things themselves'. But he also diagnosed Malebranche's reason for this, namely the fact that Spinoza 'considers the extended substance of which bodies are modifications to be infinite and eternal'.[56] And this was indeed at the heart of Malebranche's interpretation of

Spinoza. Given that Spinoza treated extension as intelligible, infinite, indivisible, eternal and immutable, it would need to be associated with Malebranche's own intelligible extension rather than with his created extension. Leaving aside the distinction (important though it is) between modes, which could not pertain to intelligible extension, and the ideal representations of modes, which could and did, Malebranche understood Spinoza's position to be that individual bodies should have some kind of status like that in relation to intelligible extension. But then he also regarded the *ideas* of individual (kinds of) bodies, as he himself understood them, as *actually* having that kind of status in relation to it. It followed that, when Spinoza talked about bodies, the things that he was *really* talking about were ideas. And, if Spinoza was countenancing no other kind of extension besides this ideal, intelligible one, then he was not really countenancing any genuinely material, created extension at all. Fred Ablondi makes a somewhat similar point, characterising Malebranche's chief objection as being that 'Spinoza mistakes the ideas of material bodies for the bodies themselves, and in doing so, mistakenly claims that material extension is eternal, necessary and infinite'. [57] But it would surely be better to say: … eternal, necessary, infinite, immutable, intelligible, indivisible, indeed formally unextended, and therefore *not really material at all*, i.e. that Spinoza holds that there is no such thing as matter, only ideas.

Now, this would be all very well if Spinoza had said simply that extension was intelligible, infinite, indivisible, eternal and immutable, and left it at that. But he did not leave it at that. What he said was that, *insofar as* it was intelligible, it would present itself to the mind in this way; but he added that it could equally be apprehended by the imagination, and its modes would *there* present themselves as finite, divisible, temporal, generated and corruptible. So why did Malebranche simply dismiss the latter side of the coin, and focus solely on what the intellect could discover of Spinoza's extended substance? And why did More go the other way, focusing instead on that other set of features, leading him to the conclusion that Spinoza's so-called God was really just matter? Why did the former opt to associate Spinoza's extension with his own intelligible extension *as opposed to* his own material extension; and why did the latter associate it with his own material extension *as opposed to* his own spatial extension?

To answer this question, we must turn away from Malebranche and More's metaphysical commitments, to look instead at their epistemological views. For what the question really boils down to is this: which is the lying faculty, the imagination or the intellect? Malebranche and More diverged in the answers they gave to that epistemological question, and it is *this* difference that serves to explain the difference in their reactions to Spinoza.

IV THE EPISTEMOLOGIES AT THE HEART OF MORE AND MALEBRANCHE'S CRITIQUES

As we already noted above, Malebranche felt that the only real reason why we possess senses at all is to enable us to coordinate our actions in relation to the bodies around us, for the sake of the preservation of our own bodies, thereby helping to preserve the union of our souls with those bodies. Like Descartes, Malebranche felt that, as useful as the senses and imagination might have been in giving us the kind of superficial information we would need for those purposes, they were pretty hopeless when it came to penetrating into the way things really were in themselves. In order to discover the essences of things, and the eternal truths that rested upon them, we would

need to detach ourselves from our senses, and follow the natural light of the pure intellect instead.

Already in the Preface to *The Search after Truth*, Malebranche declared his position. The mind's union with the body, he wrote, 'infinitely debases man and is today the main cause of all his errors and miseries…. But when a man judges things only according to the mind's pure ideas, when he carefully avoids the noisy confusion of creatures, and, when entering into himself, he listens to his sovereign Master with his senses and passions silent, it is impossible for him to fall into error'.[58] In book one of that work, he examined and sought to confront the errors that arose from the senses. In book two, he did the same for the imagination. Finally, in book three, he arrived at the pure understanding, upon which his own more positive position would be resting. 'The imagination and the senses', he announced at the start of that book, 'are fertile and inexhaustible sources of errors and illusions, but the mind acting by itself is not so liable to err'.[59] By 'pure understanding' ('the mind acting by itself'), Malebranche meant 'the mind's faculty of knowing external objects without forming corporeal images of them in the brain to represent them. We shall then deal with intellectual ideas, by means of which the pure understanding is aware of external objects'.[60] These intellectual ideas were, of course, in God. Indeed, they *were* God, insofar as his own perfections were imperfectly imitable by—and thereby representative of—possible creatures. True enough, Malebranche did believe that the same divine ideas were additionally the immediate objects of our minds when we sensed things or, for that matter, imagined them.[61] But sensation and imagination were bodily processes, involving physical traces ('corporeal images') in the sense-organs and brain, in addition to the associated psychological experiences. And what this meant was that those psychological experiences themselves were limited, restricted by modifications (such as colour) in accordance with the laws of mind-body union. It was only through the pure intellect that our minds could separate themselves from our bodies, and thereby achieve a pure and unmodified apprehension of the divine ideas as they really were. And, by apprehending these ideas, we could apprehend truth itself: for Malebranche defined an eternal truth as a relation among these ideas, whether a relation of magnitude (in the case of mathematical truths) or a relation of perfection (in the case of moral ones).[62]

With this in mind, consider what Malebranche found when he read Spinoza. When Spinoza apprehended extension intellectually, he discovered it to be indivisible, infinite, ungenerated and incorruptible. That, then, was the truth of the matter. For Malebranche, if the intellect found it to be so, then it was so. And then, given these features, it was only to be expected that Malebranche would identify the object of Spinoza's mind with the divine idea of extension, i.e. with the indivisible, infinite, ungenerated and incorruptible intelligible extension that he (Malebranche) had elsewhere theorised. The fact that Spinoza himself regarded this object as divine would only have served to reinforce this interpretation for Malebranche.

True enough, Spinoza did additionally allow us to apprehend this same object through the imagination or senses: but then so too did Malebranche, with his theory of vision in God. When Spinoza apprehended extension in this way, it would present itself to his mind as something divisible, finite, generated and corruptible. And the same was true of Malebranche's intelligible extension: the modifications in our perception of it, when we apprehended it in that way, would give rise to just such a perception, as a result of the laws of mind-body union. But that lower perception was not to be trusted. It could perhaps give us a confused awareness of the existence of the particular created extensions that surrounded us, one that was more or less sufficient

for the purposes of preserving our bodies. But that was the most that it could do. It certainly could not shed any light on the true, intrinsic nature of the object that our minds were actually in contact with.

And the difference between Spinoza and Malebranche lay in the fact that the former countenanced *only* this one object, whereas the latter also postulated a second. For Malebranche, intelligible extension was merely the ideal and archetypal representation of bodies: but at least bodies really did exist for it to be representing. It might have been a gross error for us to project sensually-perceived imperfections (like divisibility, finiteness or mutability) onto intelligible extension, but at least those imperfections did have *something* to which to attach themselves, namely those created bodies themselves. Intelligible extension could represent the various modes and limitations of bodies to the mind, but bodies really could *possess* these modes and limitations, intrinsically and in their own right. For Spinoza, by contrast, if we (i) refuse to allow that his extended substance could be intrinsically both indivisible and divisible (on grounds of contradiction); (ii) hold that it must be indivisible (because the pure intellect discovers it to be so, and the intellect is always right); and (iii) refuse to allow that anything else exists *but* this one extended substance, then we will be very naturally led to the conclusion that nothing in Spinoza's ontology was really divisible at all. The thing that he was retaining was the archetypal idea of body. The things that he was omitting were the bodies themselves. When we apprehended infinite and indivisible extension through the senses or imagination, we would be getting an impression that *purported* to be an impression of a finite and divisible extension. But it would not really be so, because the immediate object of our minds was not really like that in itself, and because it was not even so much as *representing* anything like that, for there was no further object that it could represent.

What then of Henry More? Unlike Malebranche, More only rarely and briefly engaged in directly epistemological discussions: but we can find a few, and they are sufficient to make his epistemological position clear enough. More drew a distinction between three cognitive faculties in the soul, which he identified as 'either the *Common notions* that all men in their wits agree upon, or the *Evidence of outward Sense*, or else a *clear and distinct Deduction from these*'.[63]

The third of these faculties, deduction, need not detain us, for this could not provide the mind with any new data of its own, but was merely there for the purposes of articulating, analysing and processing the data we already had from other sources. As for the common notions, these had their foundation in innate ideas, which More regarded as 'the natural Furniture of humane Understanding'.[64] Since we were all equipped with such concepts, independently of experience, we could all grasp the truth of certain innate principles, and we would all assent to them on first hearing. Malebranche, for his part, had rejected innate ideas in favour of an illuminating union with the mind of God himself. From More's perspective (although Malebranche would certainly have resisted the charge, stressing the commonality of such a union across all mankind), such an appeal, and such an attempt to rest a philosophical system on an 'inner light' of this kind, would have amounted to an enthusiastic delusion. Having just drawn his tripartite division between common notions, sensation and deduction, More continued: 'Whatever is not agreeable to these three is *Fancy*, which testifies nothing of the *Truth* or *Existence* of any thing, and therefore ought not, nor cannot be assented to by any but mad-men or fools'.[65]

But the interesting thing about More's epistemology—and all the most so, given his strong Neoplatonist leanings—is the weight he was prepared to place on the evidence of the senses in particular. 'To all sensitive Objects the Soul is an *Abrasa*

Tabula', he wrote, 'but for *Moral* and *Intellectual* Principles, their Idea's or Notions are essential to the Soul'.[66] So More could not really be called an empiricist, given his commitment to a system of innate ideas. But the point is that those innate ideas would inform us about a quite separate class of principles, and had nothing whatsoever to offer when it came to our knowledge of bodies. For that, we were entirely reliant on our senses; and, within their own proper domain, our senses were fully autonomous and unimpeachable. More made it a fundamental axiom of his system that 'Whatever is clear to any one of these Three Faculties, is to be held undoubtedly true, the other having nothing to evidence to the contrary'.[67] Now, that is not to say that our senses can never lead us into error. We all know perfectly well that they can, in cases of optical illusions and the like. But, when the tower in the distance looks round, the proper way for us to establish that it is in fact square is not just to close our eyes and think really hard about it. An intellectual examination of our innate ideas is not going to help us here at all. Rather, what we need to do is get closer and *look* again, i.e. to use these same senses to correct their own mistakes. For, as for the notion that the senses might lead us globally into error, right across the board, More had no truck with that. He described external-world scepticism, of the First Meditation variety, as 'a disease incurable, and a thing rather to be pitied or laugh'd at, than seriously opposed'.[68] Given that sensation, alongside common notions and deduction, was in fact getting characterised by More as one of the three branches of 'reason',[69] it would turn out to be literally *irrational* for us not to trust the evidence that a careful and meticulous use of the senses would provide us with, concerning the reality and the nature of sensible things.

Now, turning to Spinoza's extended substance, what do we find? Is it sensible? Yes, it is. Of course, Spinoza would say that it is *also* intelligible: but, that suggestion notwithstanding, it is certainly supposed to be the sort of thing that we *can* apprehend through our senses and depict in our imaginations. And, when we do grasp it in this way, it reveals itself to be divisible, finite, generated and corruptible. So, if whatever is clear to our senses 'is to be held undoubtedly true', then Spinoza's substance must *be* divisible, finite, generated and corruptible.

There are indications within More's *Confutation* itself, that he had precisely this line of argument in mind when tackling Spinoza. Thus, for instance, he wrote of Spinoza's extended substance that, 'deprived however of daily external senses and experience, [he] denies it to be composed of parts'.[70] In the very next sentence, More observed that, as matter of fact, there *was* another kind of extension, one that 'it would be madness and delirium to consider as being composed of parts. That is, *that immobile extension* distinct from mobile matter which I have demonstrated in the *Enchridion Metaphysicum*'.[71] So, even while his own distinction between divisible material extension and indivisible spatial extension was at the forefront of his mind, More still opted to identify Spinoza's substance with the former rather than the latter. And his reasons for doing so were (i) because it was supposed to be sensible; (ii) because our daily external senses and experience clearly revealed that sensible extension was composed of separable parts; and (iii) because our senses were autonomous and incontrovertible in whatever testimony they happened to give concerning sensible things. Later on, More explicitly addressed Spinoza's contention that something that might appear one way in the imagination could appear in a different way in the intellect. Perhaps so: but which of these faculties would be judging *more rightly* of the intrinsic nature of extension? More unequivocally opted for the former. 'And indeed the imagination rightly prophesies of those things which the senses have bestowed upon it', he wrote. 'Since the entire world is indeed

sensible, the imagination philosophizes of the universal matter of the world more rightly than the intellect of the most acute Spinoza'.[72] (Note the sarcasm, a quality that runs throughout More's *Confutation*).

And thus, when considered against the backdrop of their respective epistemological systems, the divergence in More and Malebranche's reactions to Spinoza begins to make perfect sense. If Spinoza's single extension was presenting itself in directly contradictory ways to different faculties of his mind, this went to show that one or other faculty could not be showing him its true, intrinsic nature. But which one? As far as their own ontological commitments were concerned, both Malebranche and More could have gone either way, given that each of them countenanced two really distinct kinds of extension (in a loose sense of that last word in Malebranche's case—but then, the expression was his own), and each of these fell closely in line with one or other of Spinoza's two takes on his single extension. But, as far Malebranche was concerned, the intellect was always to be trusted over the senses and imagination. Consequently, he took Spinoza's extension to be *really* indivisible, infinite, and eternally immutable, given that the intellect discovered it to be so. And therefore he was inclined to associate it with his own intelligible extension. For Malebranche, it was the archetypal and divine idea of extension that Spinoza was retaining, while created bodies, properly so-called, were simply absent from his ontology. Notwithstanding his tendency to treat the idea of extension as if it was something corporeal, Malebranche's Spinoza was in fact denying creation. By contrast, More felt that, when it came to sensible things, our best guides were the senses themselves. Consequently, he took Spinoza's extension to be *really* divisible, finite, generated and corruptible, given that it plainly revealed itself to the senses in that way. And therefore he was inclined to associate it with his own material extension. For More, the thing that was missing from Spinoza's ontology was space, i.e. the immensity of God himself. More's Spinoza was an atheist. The only thing that *this* Spinoza countenanced was matter.[73]

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[1] Boyle 2001, vol. 4: 232 (More to Boyle, 4 December 1671).

[2] More helpfully lists the dates of composition of his various works in the Praefatio Generalissima to More 1679: here page xii. The *Confutation* occupies pp. 615–635 of this volume, preceded by *Ad V.C. epistola altera*, 563–614. The *Confutation* is also available in a bilingual Latin-English edition, More 1991, and my references will be to this edition. Its full extended title (as translated by Jacob) is as follows: 'A brief and firm confutation of the demonstration of the two propositions in Spinoza which are the chief columns of atheism, namely that necessary existence pertains to substance as substance, and that there is but a single substance in the universe'.

[3] Malebranche 1997a: 138, 150. Admittedly, Spinoza is not actually mentioned by name in this work.

[4] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 16: 25 (cf. vol. 17-1: 622), and 103. Wherever a text has been published in English translation, that is the source that I shall use; otherwise, I shall be using the text of this edition of the collected works, and the translations will be my own.

[5] See Lai 1985 and Mungello 1980.

[6] The correspondence was first published in 1841 from a manuscript that has since been lost. It is to be found in Malebranche 1958–84, occupying most of vol. 19: 852–912, and is available in English in Malebranche 1995: 59–114. Perhaps the best study of it is Ablondi 1998.

[7] Malebranche 1995: 68–69. Mairan's own position in relation to Spinozism (but especially as relating to the *Theological-Political Treatise* and to Chinese philosophy, more than to the *Ethics* and the debate with Malebranche) is explored in Rodis-Lewis 1988.

[8] Malebranche 1995: 69. In his second letter, now reinstalled in Paris, he indicated that he had taken the opportunity to re-read several passages in Spinoza (op. cit.: 76).

[9] Spinoza 2002: 226–27 (*Ethics*, Sch. Pr. 15, I). There is also a closely related discussion in Letter 12 (to Meyer, 20 April 1663), op. cit., 787–91. In that latter discussion, when discussing how we represent quantity in the imagination, Spinoza explicitly adds: 'with the help of the senses' (789).

[10] Spinoza 2002: 267–68 (*Ethics*, Sch. 2, Pr. 40, II). See also the related discussion in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, op. cit., especially 7–8.

[11] Spinoza 2002: 268 (*Ethics*, Pr. 41, II).

[12] More's fullest discussions of these two kinds of extensions, and the substances to which they were supposed to belong, are to be found in: (i) *The Immortality of the Soul* (the definitive edition of which is that included in More 1712), book 1, chapters 2–10; (ii) *Divine Dialogues* (i.e. More 1713), dialogue 1, §§21–36; and (iii) *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (i.e. More 1995), chapters 6–10, 27–28. For discussion of More's position, see: Anderson 1933, chapters 4 and 5; Koyré 1957, chapter 6; Reid 2003a.

[13] More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 8, in More 1712.

[14] More 1991, 94, 100. The reference is to More 1995, vol. 1: 84–89.

[15] Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, part 2, §§10–12, 16–18, in Descartes 1984–91, vol. 1: 227–28, 229–31.

[16] More discussed the possibility or impossibility of a vacuum with Descartes directly, in their correspondence of 1648–1649. More's side of this correspondence has never been published in a full English translation (although Descartes' side has been, and can be found in the third volume of Descartes 1984–91), but the complete correspondence is available in the original Latin in various places, not least More 1712. It is also available in a bilingual Latin-French edition: Descartes et al. 1953.

[17] More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 37, in More 1712.

[18] More 1995, vol. 1: 57.

[19] Among many other places that might be cited for remarks to this effect, see Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 9: 966–67.

[20] Gassendi 1972: 384–90.

[21] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 10: 98–99, 101.

[22] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 10: 99, here following the text of the first edition: I shall come onto the change that Malebranche made in the second edition in just a moment.
[23] Arnauld 1775–83, vol. 38: 402. Even when Malebranche replied to this charge, Arnauld was still not happy, and continued to read Malebranche's distinction between material and intelligible extension in a Gassendist way. See especially the eighth of the *Nine Letters* that Arnauld wrote against the *Three Letters* that Malebranche wrote against the *Defence* that Arnauld wrote against the *Response* that Malebranche wrote against Arnauld's first salvo against him, *On True and False Ideas*: Arnauld 1775–83, vol. 39: 122–23, 146–47. See also Arnauld's letter to Nicole of 17 April 1684, as well as Nicole's own letter to Arnauld of 12 April, both reprinted in Malebranche 1958–1984, vol. 18, 304, 308–10.
[24] Arnauld 1775–83, vol. 38: 517.
[25] Arnauld 1775–83, vol. 38: 518. For discussion of these issues, see Gouhier 1948: part 3, chapter 5; Koyré 1957: 155–59; Ndiaye 1980; Radner 1978: especially 113–18.
[26] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 6: 231.
[27] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 6: 232.
[28] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 6: 234.
[29] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 10: 99.
[30] Malebranche 1997b: 625.
[31] Malebranche 1997b: 49.
[32] Malebranche 1997b: 218.
[33] Ibid. See also, in the correspondence with Mairan itself, Malebranche 1995: 85 (Malebranche to Mairan, 12 June 1714).
[34] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 17-1: 283.
[35] For more on all this, see Reid 2003b.
[36] See the Sixth Elucidation to Malebranche 1997b: 568–76.
[37] Malebranche 1995: 104 (Malebranche to Mairan, 6 September 1714). See also Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 17-1: 286–87; and Radner 1978: 112–13 and 145 n. 90.
[38] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 9: 954–55, here following the text of the first edition (1704) of this piece (*Réponse… à la troisième lettre de M. Arnauld*). The second edition (1709) inserts a quotation from St Augustine, but not one that adds much to the text.
[39] Besides the statement in his first letter to Mairan, that he did not have a copy of Spinoza's text where he was in the country (see n. 8 above), a much earlier letter to François Lami (2 November 1684) also alludes to 'the principles of Spinoza, in so far as I can remember them, for I do not have enough leisure to reread that miserable philosopher's book'. Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 18: 335.
[40] More 1991: 72–77; he also discussed the related passage from the 1663 letter to Meyer (see n. 9 above), op. cit., 60–61.
[41] More 1991: 69.
[42] More 1991: 77.
[43] Ibid.
[44] More 1991: 97; and see also 100.
[45] More 1991: 77.
[46] More 1991: 72.
[47] More 1991: 118.
[48] More 1991: 101.
[49] Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 6: 232.
[50] Malebranche 1995: 70 (Malebranche to Mairan, 29 September 1713).
[51] One (now rather elderly) study of the correspondence reverses this, giving material extension primacy and suggesting that Malebranche was taking Spinoza to have been confusing intelligible extension with *that* rather than vice versa. However, George Getchev's reversal is based on a mistranslation, putting the word 'for' in the wrong place. Where Grene has 'he takes for the world or created extension the intelligible world', Getchev has 'he takes the world, or created extension, for intelligible extension', for Malebranche's 'il prend pour le monde ou l'etendue creée le monde intelligible' (Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 19: 855). (Getchev 1932: 387, and see also 388, 392). Consequently, Getchev's otherwise handy summary of the correspondence should be handled with some caution.
[52] Malebranche 1995: 75 (Mairan to Malebranche, 9 November 1713).
[53] Malebranche 1995: 77 (Malebranche to Mairan, 5 December 1713).
[54] Malebranche 1995: 83–84 (Mairan to Malebranche, 6 May 1714). The bracketed interpolation is the editors'.

[55] Malebranche 1995: 85 (Malebranche to Mairan, 12 June 1714). The bracketed interpolations are, again, the editors'. But I have amended the translation of the final sentence. Grene's translation reads: 'We do not see what God saw in himself'. But the French is '*ne… que*', not '*ne… pas*' (Malebranche 1958–84, vol. 19: 883).
[56] Malebranche 1995: 90 (Mairan to Malebranche, 26 August 1714).
[57] Ablondi 1998: 191.
[58] Malebranche 1997b: xxxiii, xxxvii.
[59] Malebranche 1997b: 197.
[60] Malebranche 1997b: 198.
[61] In addition to a theory of vision in God, Malebranche did also subscribe to a theory of imagination in God. He wrote that, when we imagine (for instance) a circle, a determinate part of intelligible extension 'lightly touches' the mind (Malebranche 1997a: 17).
[62] See, among many other places, Malebranche 1997a: 61, 142; Malebranche 1997b: 233–35, 433–34, 489.
[63] More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, 38, in More 1712. The same distinction is also drawn in *The Immortality of the Soul*, 3–4, in the same volume.
[64] More, *An Antidote Against Atheism*, 18, in More 1712. On More's theory of innate ideas, see Crocker 2003: 70–73; and Lamprecht 1926.
[65] More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, 38, in More 1712.
[66] More, *Annotations upon Lux Orientalis*, 19, in More et al. 1682. The stray apostrophe is More's own.
[67] More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 4, in More 1712.
[68] More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 2, in More 1712. Richard Popkin has sought to paint a considerably more sceptical image of More, on no good grounds that I can see, in Popkin 1987: 170–74, as well as in other works. Alan Gabbey has countered this in Gabbey 1993.
[69] More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, 38, in More 1712.
[70] More 1991: 60–61.
[71] More 1991: 61. See also 74, 91.
[72] More 1991: 73–74. See also 76, where More tackled Spinoza's remarks (in the scholium to proposition 15) about water, and observed that it 'is plainly confirmed from sense and reason' that water is divided into particles.
[73] This material was originally presented at the conference 'Henry More as Critic: On the Context and Importance of his Reception of Spinoza', held at the Maison Française d'Oxford on 23 May 2011. I should like to thank the organisers and participants of this conference.